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TORONTO

THE
WINDING STAIR
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
W. B. YEATS

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TO
EDMUND DULAC

DEAR DULAC,

I saw my *Hawk's Well* played by students of our Schools of Dancing and of Acting a couple of years ago in a beautiful little theatre called 'The Peacock', which shares a roof with the Abbey Theatre. Watching Cuchulain in his lovely mask and costume, that old masked man who seems hundreds of years old, that Guardian of the Well, with your great golden wings and dancing to your music, I had one of those moments of excitement that are the dramatist's reward and decided there and then to dedicate to you my next book of verse.

'A Woman Young and Old' was written before the publication of *The Tower*, but left out for some reason I cannot recall. I think that I was roused to write 'Death' and 'Blood and the Moon' by the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, the finest intellect in Irish public life, and, I think I may add, to some extent, my friend. 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' was written in the spring of 1928 during a long illness, indeed finished the day before a Cannes doctor told me to stop writing. Then in the spring of 1929 life returned as an impression of the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators; it seemed that but for journalism and criticism, all that evasion and explanation, the world would be torn in pieces. I wrote 'Mad as the Mist and Snow', a mechanical little song, and after that almost all that group of poems called in memory of those exultant weeks 'Words for Music Perhaps'. Then ill again, I warmed myself back into life with 'Byzantium' and 'Veronica's Napkin', looking for a theme that might befit my years. Since then I have added a few poems to 'Words for Music Perhaps', but always keeping the mood and plan of the first poems.

W. B. YEATS

1933

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IN MEMORY OF EVA GORE-
BOOTH AND CON MARKIEWICZ

THE light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.
But a raving autumn shears
Blossom from the summer's wreath ;
The older is condemned to death,
Pardoned, drags out lonely years
Conspiring among the ignorant.
I know not what the younger dreams—
Some vague Utopia—and she seems,
When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,
An image of such politics.
Many a time I think to seek
One or the other out and speak
Of the old Georgian mansion, mix

Pictures of the mind, recall
That table and the talk of youth,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.

Dear shadows, now you know it all,
All the folly of a fight
With a common wrong or right.
The innocent and the beautiful
Have no enemy but time ;
Arise and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch ;
Should the conflagration climb,
Run till all the sages know.
We the great gazebo built,
They convicted us of guilt ;
Bid me strike a match and blow.

October 1927

DEATH

NOR dread nor hope attend
A dying animal ;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all ;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath ;
He knows death to the bone—
Man has created death.

A DIALOGUE OF SELF AND SOUL

I

My Soul. I summon to the winding
ancient stair ;
Set all your mind upon the steep
ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battle-
ment,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden
pole ;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is
done :
Who can distinguish darkness from
the soul ?

My Self. The consecrated blade upon
my knees

Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-
glass

Unspotted by the centuries ;
That flowering, silken, old embroid-
ery, torn

From some court-lady's dress and
round

The wooden scabbard bound and
wound,

Can, tattered, still protect, faded
adorn.

My Soul. Why should the imagination
of a man

Long past his prime remember things
that are

Emblematical of love and war ?

Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering

DIALOGUE OF

To this end that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and
birth.

My Self. Mont high, third of his
family, fashioned it
Five hundred years ago, about it lie
Flower from I know not what embroidery—
Heart' purple—and all the I set
For emblem of the day in the
tower
Emblematic of the night,
And claim by soldier's right
A character to commit the crime once
more.

My Soul. Such fullness in the quarter
overflows
And fall into the basin of the mind
That is stricken deaf and dumb
and blind,
For intellect no longer know

SELF AND SOUL 7

*Is from the Ought, or Knower from
the Known—*

That is to say, ascends to Heaven ;
Only the dead can be forgiven ;
But when I think of that my tongue's
stone.

II

My Self. A living man is blind and
drinks his drop.

What matter if the ditches are im-
pure ?

What matter if I live it all once more ?

Endure that toil of growing up ;
The ignominy of boyhood ; the dis-
tress

Of boyhood changing into man ;
The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own
clumsiness ;

The finished man among his ene-
mies ?—

DIALOGUE OF

How in the name of Heaven can h
escape
That defiling and disfigured shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eyes until at last
He thinks that shape must be his
shape ?
And what's the good of an escape
If honour find him in the wintry
blast ?

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to
pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind m n's
ditch,
A blind m n battering blind men ;
Or into that most fecund ditch of
all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud wom n not kindred of his
soul.

SELF AND SOUL

9

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot ; forgive myself the
lot !

When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the
breast

We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.

LOOD AND THE MOON

I

BL ss d b this pl ce,
More blessed still this tower ;
A bloody, rrog nt power
Rose out of the r ce
Uttering, m stering it,
Rose like these w lls from these
Storm-be te cott ges—
In ockery I h ve set
A powerful bl m up,
A d sing it rhy upon rhy
In mockery of ti e
H lf de d t th top.

II

Al x dri 's w b , con tower, nd
bylon's

BLOOD AND THE MOON 11

A i g of the movi g he ven , log-
book of the sun's journey nd th
moon' ;

A d Shelley h d his towers, thought'
crowned pow r he c lled them
onc .

I d cl r thi tower is my ymbol ; I
decl re

Thi windi g, gyri g, piring tre d-
mill of t ir i my ncestr l
t ir ;

Th t Goldsmith nd the De n, Berke-
ley nd Burke h ve tr velled there.

Swift b ting on hi bre st in sibylline
fr y blind

Bec use the he rt in his blood-sodden
bre st h d dr gged hi down into
m nkind,

Golds ith deliber tely sipping t the
ho ey-pot of his mind,

12 BLOOD AND THE MOON

And haughtier-headed Burke that
proved the State a tree,
That this unconquerable labyrinth of
the birds, century after century,
Cast but dead leaves to man thematical
equality ;

And God-appointed Berkeley that
proved all things a dream,
That this pragmatical, preposterous
pig of a world, its farrow that so
solid seem,
Must vanish on the instant if the mind
but change its theme ;

Saeva Indignatio and the labourer's
hire,
The strength that gives our blood and
state magnanimity of its own
desire ;
Everything that is not God consumed
with intellectual fire.

BLOOD AND THE MOON 1

III

The purity of the unclouded moon
Has flung its arrowy shaft upon the
floor.

Seven centuries have passed and it is
pure ;

The blood of innocence has left no
stain.

There, on blood-saturated ground, have
stood

Soldier, assassin, executioner,
Whether for daily pittance or in blind
fear

Or out of abstract hatred, and shed
blood,

But could not cast a single jet thereon.
Odour of blood on the ncestr l
stair !

And we that have shed none must
gather there

And clamour in drunken frenzy for
the moon.

14 BLOOD AND THE MOON

IV

Upon the dusty, glittering windows
cling,
And seem to cling upon the moonlit
skies,
Tortoiseshell butterflies, peacock but-
terflies :
A couple of night-moths are on the
wing.
Is every modern nation like the tower,
Half dead at the top ? No matter
what I said,
For wisdom is the property of the dead,
A something incompatible with life ;
and power,
Like everything that has the stain of
blood,
A property of the living ; but no stain
Can come upon the visage of the moon
When it has looked in glory from
cloud.

OIL AND BLOOD

IN tombs of gold and lapis lazuli
Bodies of holy men and women exude
Miraculous oil, odour of violet.

But under heavy loads of trampled
 clay
Lie bodies of the vampires full of
 blood ;
Their shrouds re bloody and their lips
 are wet.

VERONICA'S NAPKIN

THE Heavenly Circuit ; Berenice's
Hair ;

Tent-pole of Eden ; the tent's drapery ;
Symbolical glory of the earth and air !
The Father and His angelic hierarchy
That made the magnitude and glory
there

Stood in the circuit of a needle's eye.

Some found a different pole, and where
it stood

A pattern on a napkin dipped in blood.

SYMBOLS

A STORM-BEATEN old watch-tower,
A blind hermit rings the hour.

All-destroying sword-blade still
Carried by the wandering fool.

Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade,
Beauty and fool together laid.

SPILT MILK

WE that have done and thought,
That have thought and done,
Must ramble, and thin out
Like milk spilt on a stone.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
AND AFTER

THOUGH the great song return no more
There's keen delight in what we have :
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave.

STATISTICS

‘ THOSE Platonists are a curse,’ he said,
‘ God’s fire upon the wane,
A diagram hung there instead,
More women born th n men.’

THREE MOVEMENTS

SHAKESPEAREAN fish swam the sea , f r
away from land ;

Romantic fish swam in nets coming to
the hand ;

What are all those fish th t lie gasping
on the strand ?

THE SEVEN SAGES

The First. My great-grandfather spoke
to Edmund Burke
In Grattan's house.

The Second. My great-grand-
father shared
A pot-house bench with Oliver Gold-
smith once.

The Third. My great - grandfather's
father talked of music,
Drank tar-water with the Bishop of
Cloyne.

The Fourth. But mine saw Stella once.

The Fifth. Whence came our thought ?

The Sixth. From four great minds that
hated Whiggery.

The Fifth. Burke was a Whig.

The Sixth. Whether they knew or not,
 Goldsmith and Burke, Swift and the
 Bishop of Cloyne
 All hated Whiggery ; but what is
 Whiggery ?
 A levelling, rancorous, rational sort
 of mind
 That never looked out of the eye of
 a saint
 Or out of drunkard's eye.

The Seventh. All's Whiggery now,
 But we old men are massed against
 the world.

The First. American colonies, Ireland,
 France and India
 Harried, and Burke's great melody
 against it.

The Second. Oliver Goldsmith sang
 what he had seen,
 Roads full of beggars, cattle in the
 fields,

24 THE SEVEN SAGES

But never saw the trefoil stained*
with blood,

The avenging leaf those fields raised
up against it.

The Fourth. The tomb of Swift wears
it away.

The Third. A voice
Soft as the rustle of a reed from
Cloyne

That gathers volume ; now a thun-
der-clap.

The Sixth. What schooling had these
four ?

The Seventh. They walked the roads
Mimicking what they heard, as chil-
dren mimic ;

They understood that wisdom comes
of beggary.

THE CRAZED MOON

CRAZED through much child-bearing
The moon is staggering in the sky ;
Moon-struck by the despairing
Glances of her wandering eye
We grope, and grope in vain,
For children born of her pain.

Children dazed or dead !
When she in all her virginal pride
First trod on the mountain's head
What stir ran through the countryside
Where every foot obeyed her glance !
What manhood led the dance !

Fly-catchers of the moon,
Our hands are blenched, our fingers
seem

26 THE CRAZED MOON

But slender needles of bone ;
Blenched by that malicious dream
They are spread wide that each
May rend what comes in reach.

COOLE PARK, 1929

I MEDITATE upon a swallow's flight,
Upon an aged woman and her house,
A sycamore and lime tree lost in night
Although that western cloud is lumin-
ous,
Great works constructed there in
nature's spite
For scholars and for poets after.us,
Thoughts long knitted into a single
thought,
A dance-like glory that those walls
begot.

There Hyde before he had beaten into
prose
That noble blade the Muses buckled on,
There one that ruffled in manly
pose

28 COOLE PARK, 19 9

For all his timid heart, there that slow
man,
That meditative man, John Synge, and
those
Impetuous men, Shaw Taylor and
Hugh Lane,
Found pride established in humility,
A scene well set and excellent company.

They came like swallows and like
swallows went,
And yet a woman's powerful character
Could keep a swallow to its first intent;
And half a dozen in formation there,
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-
point,
Found certainty upon the dreaming
air,
The intellectual sweetness of those
lines
That cut through time or cross it
withershins.

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your
stand
When all those rooms and passages are
gone,
When nettles wave upon a shapeless
mound
And saplings root among the broken
stone,
And dedicate—eyes bent upon the
ground,
Back turned upon the brightness of
the sun
And all the sensuality of the shade—
A moment's memory to that laurelled
head.

COOLE AND BALLYLEE,

1931

UNDER my window-ledge the waters
race,

Otters below and moor-hens on the top,
Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's
face

Then darkening through 'dark' Raft-
ery's 'cellar' drop,

Run underground, rise in a rocky place
In Coole demesne, and there to finish up
Spread to lake and drop into a hole.
What's water but the generated soul?

Upon the border of that lake's a wood
Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun,
And in a copse of beeches there I stood,
For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin
on

COOLE AND BALLYLEE 31

And all the rant's a mirror of my mood:
At sudden thunder of the mounting
 swan
I turned about and looked where
 branches break
The glittering reaches of the flooded
 lake.

Another emblem there ! That stormy
 white

But seems a concentration of the sky ;
And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
And in the morning's gone, no man
 knows why ;

And is so lovely that it sets to right
What knowledge or its lack had set
 awry,

So arrogantly pure, a child might think
It can be murdered with spot of ink.

Sound of a stick upon the floor, a sound
From somebody that toils from chair
 to chair ;

32 COOLE AND BALLYLEE

Beloved books that famous hands have
bound,
Old marble heads, old pictures every-
where ;
Great rooms where travelled men and
children found
Content or joy ; a last inheritor
Where none has reigned that lacked a
name and fame
Or out of folly into folly came.

A spot whereon the founders lived and
died
Seemed once more dear than life ;
ancestral trees
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
Man shifts about—all that great glory
spent—
Like some poor Arab tribesman and
his tent.

•We were the last romantics—chose for
theme

Traditional sanctity and loveliness ;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people ; whatever
most can bless

The mind of man or elevate a rhyme ;
But all is changed, that high horse
riderless,

Though mounted in that saddle Homer
rode

Where the swan drifts upon a darken-
ing flood.

FOR ANNE GREGORY

‘NEVER shall a young man,
Thrown into despair
By those great honey-coloured
Ramparts at your ear,
Love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.’

‘ But I can get a hair-dye
And set such colour there,
Brown, or black, or carrot,
That young men in despair
May love me for myself alone
And not my yellow hair.’

‘ I heard an old religious man
But yesternight declare

FOR ANNE GREGORY 35

That he had found a text to prove
That only God, my dear,
Could love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.'

SWIFT'S EPITAPH

SWIFT has sailed into his rest ;
Savage indignation there
Cannot lacerate his breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
World-besotted traveller ; he
Served human liberty.

AT ALGECIRAS—A MEDITATION
UPON DEATH

THE heron-billed pale cattle-birds
That feed on some foul parasite
Of the Moroccan flocks and herds
Cross the narrow Straits to light
In the rich midnight of the garden
trees
Till the dawn break upon those
mingled seas.

Often t evening when a boy
Would I carry to a friend—
Hoping more substantial joy
Did an older mind commend—
Not such as are in Newton's metaphor,
But actual shells of Rosses' level
shore.

Greater glory in the sun,
An evening chill upon the air,
Bid imagination run
Much on the Great Questioner ;
What He can question, what if ques-
tioned I
Can with a fitting confidence reply.

November 1928

THE CHOICE

THE intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story's finished, what's
the news ?

In luck or out the toil has left its mark :
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

MOHINI CHATTERJEE

I ASKED if I should pray,
But the Brahmin said,
' Pray for nothing, say
Every night in bed,
" I have been a king,
I have been a slave,
Nor is there anything,
Fool, rascal, knave,
That I have not been,
And yet upon my breast
A myriad heads have lain.' ' '

That he might set at rest
A boy's turbulent days
Mohini Chatterjee
Spoke these, or words like these.
I add in commentary,

' Old lovers yet may have
 All that time denied—
 Grave is heaped on grave
 That they be satisfied—
 Over the blackened earth
 The old troops parade,
 Birth is heaped on birth
 That such cannonade
 May thunder time away,
 Birth-hour and death-hour meet,
 Or, as great sages say,
 Men dance on deathless feet.'

BYZANTIUM

THE unpurged images of day recede ;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are
abed ;

Night resonance recedes, night-walkers'
song

After great cathedral gong ;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or
shade,

Shade more than man, more image
than a shade ;

For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-
cloth

May unwind the winding path ;

A' mouth that has no moisture and no
breath

Breathless mouths may summon ;
I hail the superhuman ;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle th n bird or handi-
work,

Planted on the starlit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn
aloud

In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or
blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pave-
ment flit

Flames th t no faggot feeds, nor steel
- has lit,

Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of
flame,

Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a
sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and
blood,
Spirit after spirit ! The smithies break
the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor !
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented
sea.

THE MOTHER OF GOD

THE three-fold terror of love ; a
 fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear ;
Wings beating about the room ;
The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the
 shows
Every common woman knows,
Chimney corner, garden walk,
Or rocky cistern where we tread the
 clothes
And gather all the talk ?

What is this flesh I purchased with my
 pains,

4 THE MOTHER OF GOD

This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood
stop
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up ?

VACILLATION

I

BETWEEN extremities
Man runs his course ;
A brand, or flaming breath,
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night ;
The body calls it death,
The heart remorse.
But if these be right
What is joy ?

II

A tree there is that from its topmost
bough
Is half all glittering flame and half ll
green

Abounding foliage moistened with the
dew ;
And half is half and yet is all the scene ;
And half and half consume what they
renew,
And he that Attis' image hangs be-
tween
That staring fury and the blind lush
leaf
May know not what he knows, but
knows not grief.

III

Get all the gold and silver that you can,
Satisfy ambition, or animate
The trivium days and ram them with
the sun,
And yet upon these maxims meditate :
All women dote upon an idle man ,
Although their children need a rich
estate ;
No man has ever lived that had enough
Of children's gratitude or woman's love.

No longer in Lethean foliage caught
Begin the preparation for your death
And from the fortieth winter by that
thought
Test every work of intellect or faith
And everything that your own hands
have wrought,
And call those works extravagance of
breath
That are not suited for such men as
come
Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the
tomb.

IV

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed ;

And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

V

Although the summer sunlight gild
Cloudy leafage of the sky,
Or wintry moonlight sink the field
In storm-scattered intricacy,
I cannot look thereon,
Responsibility so weighs me down.

Things said or done long years ago,
Or things I did not do or say
But thought that I might say or do,
Weigh me down, and not a day
But something is recalled,
My conscience or my vanity appalled.

VI

A rivery field spread out below,
An odour of the new-mown hay

In' his nostrils, the great lord of
 Chou
 Cried, casting off the mountain snow,
 ' Let all things pass away.'

Wheels by milk-white asses drawn
 Where Babylon or Nineveh
 Rose ; some conqueror drew rein
 And cried to battle-weary men,
 ' Let all things pass away.'

From man's blood-sodden heart are
 sprung
 Those branches of the night and day
 Where the gaudy moon is hung.
 What's the meaning of all song ?
 ' Let all things pass away.'

VII

The Soul. Seek out re lity, leave things
 that seem.

The Heart. What, be a singer born and
 lack theme ?

The Soul. Isaiah's coal, what more can
man desire ?

The Heart. Struck dumb in the sim-
plicity of fire !

The Soul. Look on that fire, salvation
walks within.

The Heart. What theme had Homer
but original sin ?

VIII

Must we part, Von Hügel, though much
alike, for we

Accept the miracles of the saints and
honour sanctity ?

The body of Saint Teresa lies un-
decayed in tomb,

Bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours
from it come,

Healing from its lettered slab. Those
self-same hands perchance

Eternalised the body of a modern saint
that once

H 'd scooped out Pharaoh's mummy.

I—though heart might find relief

Did I become a Christian man and
choose for my belief

What seems most welcome in the tomb
—play a predestined part.

Homer is my example and his un-
christened heart.

The lion and the honeycomb, what has
Scripture said ?

So get you gone, Von Hügel, though
with blessings on your head.

QUARREL IN OLD AGE

WHERE had her sweetness gone ?
What fanatics invent
In this blind bitter town,
Fantasy or incident
Not worth thinking of,
Put her in a rage.
I had forgiven enough
That had forgiven old age.

All lives that has lived ;
So much is certain ;
Old senses were not deceived :
Somewhere beyond the curtain
Of distorting days
Lives that lonely thing
That shone before these eyes
Targeted, trod like Spring.

THE RESULTS OF THOUGHT

ACQUAINTANCE ; companion ;
One dear brilliant woman ;
The best-endowed, the elect,
All by their youth undone,
All, all, by that inhuman
Bitter glory wrecked.

But I have straightened out
Ruin, wreck and wrack ;
I toiled long years and at length
Came to so deep a thought
I can summon back
All their wholesome strength.

What images are these
That turn dull-eyed away,

56 THE RESULTS OF THOUGHT

Or shift Time's filthy load,
Straighten aged knees,
Hesitate or stay ?
What heads shake or nod ?

August 1931

GRATITUDE TO THE UNKNOWN INSTRUCTORS

WHAT they undertook to do
They brought to pass ;
All things hang like a drop of dew
Upon a blade of grass.

REMORSE FOR INTEMPERATE SPEECH

I RANTED to the knave and fool,
But outgrew that school,
Would transform the part,
Fit audience found, but cannot rule
My fanatic ¹ heart.

I sought my betters : though in
e ch
Fine manners, liberal speech,
Turn hatred into sport,
Nothing said or done can reach
My fanatic heart.

I pronounce ' fanatic ' in what is, I suppose,
older and more Irish way, so that the last line
each stanza contains but two beats.

REMORSE

59

Out of Ireland have we come.
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.

August 28, 1981

STREAM AND SUN AT GLENDALOUGH

THROUGH intricate motions ran
Stream and gliding sun
And all my heart seemed gay :
Some stupid thing that I had done
Made my attention stray.

Repentance keeps my heart impure ;
But what am I that dare
Fancy that I can
Better conduct myself or have more
Sense than a common man ?

What motion of the sun or stream
Or eyelid shot the gleam

STREAM AND SUN 61

That pierced my body through ?
What made me live like these that
 seem
Self-born, born anew ?

June 1932

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

I

CRAZY JANE AND THE BISHOP

BRING me to the blasted oak
That I, midnight upon the stroke,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
May call down curses on his head
Because of my dear Jack that's dead.
Coxcomb was the least he said :
The solid man and the coxcomb.

Nor was he Bishop when his ban
Banished Jack the Journeyman,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
Nor so much as parish priest,
Yet he, an old book in his fist,
Cried that we lived like beast and beast :
The solid man and the coxcomb.

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 6

The Bishop has a skin, God knows,
Wrinkled like the foot of a goose,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
Nor can he hide in holy black
The heron's hunch upon his back,
But a birch-tree stood my Jack :
The solid man and the coxcomb.

Jack had my virginity,
And bids me to the oak, for he
(All find safety in the tomb.)
Wanders out into the night
And there is shelter under it,
But should that other come, I spit :
The solid man and the coxcomb.

II

CRAZY JANE REPROVED

I care not what the sailors say :
All those dreadful thunder-stones,
All that storm that blots the day
Can but show that Heaven yawns ;

64 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

Great Europa played the fool
That changed a lover for a bull.
Fol de rol, fol de rol.

To round that shell's elaborate whorl,
Adorning every secret track
With the delicate mother-of-pearl,
Made the joints of Heaven crack :
So never hang your heart upon
A roaring, ranting journeyman.
Fol de rol, fol de rol.

III

CRAZY JANE ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

‘ Love is all
Unsatisfied
That cannot take the whole
Body and soul ’ ;
And that is what Jane said.

‘ Take the sour
If you take me,

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 65

I can scoff and lour
And scold for an hour.'
'That's certainly the case,' said he.

' Naked I lay,
The grass my bed ;
Naked and hidden away,
That black day ' ;
And that is what Jane said.

' What can be shown ?
What true love be ?
All could be known or shown
If Time were but gone.'
'That's certainly the case,' said he.

IV

CRAZY JANE AND JACK THE JOURNEYMAN

I know, although when looks meet
I tremble to the bone,

66 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

The more I leave the door unlatched
The sooner love is gone,
For love is but a skein unwound
Between the dark and dawn.

A lonely ghost the ghost is
That to God shall come ;
I—love's skein upon the ground,
My body in the tomb—
Shall leap into the light lost
In my mother's womb.

But were I left to lie alone
In an empty bed,
The skein so bound us ghost to ghost
When he turned his head
Passing on the road that night,
Mine would walk being dead.

V

CRAZY JANE ON GOD

That lover of a night
Came when he would,

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 67

Went in the dawning light
Whether I would or no ;
Men come, men go :
All things remain in God.

Banners choke the sky ;
Men-at-arms tread ;
Armoured horses neigh
Where the great battle was
In the narrow pass :
All things remain in God.

Before their eyes a house
That from childhood stood
Uninhabited, ruinous,
Suddenly lit up
From door to top :
All things remain in God.

I had wild Jack for a lover ;
Though like a road
That men pass over
My body makes no moan

68 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

But sings on :

All things remain in God.

VI

CRAZY JANE TALKS WITH THE BISHOP

I met the Bishop on the road

And much said he and I.

‘ Those breasts are flat and fallen now

Those veins must soon be dry ;

Live in a heavenly mansion,

Not in some foul sty.’

‘ Fair and foul are near of kin,

And fair needs foul,’ I cried.

‘ My friends are gone, but that’s a
truth

Nor grave nor bed denied,

Learned in bodily lowliness

And in the heart’s pride.

‘ A woman can be proud and stiff

When on love intent ;

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 69

But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement ;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.'

VII

CRAZY JANE GROWN OLD LOOKS AT THE DANCERS

I found that ivory image there
Dancing with her chosen youth,
But when he wound her coal-black
hair
As though to strangle her, no scream
Or bodily movement did I dare,
Eyes under eyelids did so gleam :
Love is like the lion's tooth.

When she, and though some said she
played
I said that she had danced heart's
truth,

70 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

Drew a knife to strike him dead,
I could but leave him to his fate ;
For, no matter what is said,
They had all that had their hate :
Love is like the lion's tooth.

Did he die or did she die ?
Seemed to die or died they both ?
God be with the times when I
Cared not a thraneen for what chanced
So that I had the limbs to try
Such a dance as there was danced—
Love is like the lion's tooth.

VIII

GIRL'S SONG

I went out alone
To sing a song or two,
My fancy on a man,
And you know who.

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 71

Another came in sight
That on a stick relied
To hold himself upright :
I sat and cried.

And that was all my song—
When everything is told,
Saw I an old man young
Or young man old ?

/

IX

YOUNG MAN'S SONG

' She will change,' I cried,
' Into a withered crone.'
The heart in my side,
That so still had lain,
In noble rage replied
And beat upon the bone :

' Uplift those eyes and throw
Those glances unafraid :

72 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

She would as bravely show
Did all the fabric fade ;
No withered crone I saw
Before the world was made.'

Abashed by that report,
For the heart cannot lie,
I knelt in the dirt.
And all shall bend the knee
To my offended heart
Until it pardon me.

X

HER ANXIETY

Earth in beauty dressed
Awaits returning spring.
All true love must die,
Alter at the best
Into some lesser thing.
Prove that I lie.

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 73

Such body lovers have,
Such exacting breath,
That they touch or sigh.
Every touch they give,
Love is nearer death.
Prove that I lie.

XI

HIS CONFIDENCE

Undying love to buy
I wrote upon
The corners of this eye
All wrongs done.
What payment were enough
For undying love ?

I broke my heart in two
So hard I struck.
What matter ? for I know
That out of rock,
Out of a desolate source,
Love leaps upon its course.

74 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

XII

LOVE'S LONELINESS

Old fathers, great-grandfathers,
Rise as kindred should.
If ever lover's loneliness
Came where you stood,
Pray that Heaven protect us
That protect your blood.

The mountain throws a shadow,
Thin is the moon's horn ;
What did we remember
Under the ragged thorn ?
Dread has followed longing,
And our hearts are torn.

XIII

HER DREAM

I dreamed as in my bed I lay,
All night's fathomless wisdom come,

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 75

That I had shorn my locks away
And laid them on Love's lettered tomb :
But something bore them out of sight
In a great tumult of the air,
And after nailed upon the night
Berenice's burning hair.

XIV

HIS BARGAIN

Who talks of Plato's spindle ;
What set it whirling round ?
Eternity may dwindle,
Time is unwound,
Dan and Jerry Lout
Change their loves about.

However they may take it,
Before the thread began
I made, and may not break it
When the last thread has run,
A bargain with that hair
And all the windings there.

76 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

XV

THREE THINGS

‘ O cruel Death, give three things
back,’

Sang a bone upon the shore ;

‘ A child found all a child can lack,
Whether of pleasure or of rest,
Upon the abundance of my breast ’ :
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the
wind.*

‘ Three dear things that women know,’

Sang a bone upon the shore ;

‘ A man if I but held him so
When my body was alive
Found all the pleasure that life gave ’ :
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the
wind.*

‘ The third thing that I think of yet,’

Sang a bone upon the shore,

‘ Is that morning when I met

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 77

Face to face my rightful man
And did after stretch and yawn':
*A bone wave-whitened and dried in the
wind.*

XVI

LULLABY

Beloved, may your sleep be sound
That have found it where you fed.
What were all the world's alarms
To mighty Paris when he found
Sleep upon a golden bed
That first dawn in Helen's arms?

Sleep, beloved, such a sleep
As did that wild Tristram know
When, the potion's work being done,
Roe could run or doe could leap
Under oak and beechen bough,
Roe could leap or doe could run;

Such a sleep and sound as fell
Upon Eurotas' grassy bank

78 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

When the holy bird, that there
Accomplished his predestined will,
From the limbs of Leda sank
But not from her protecting care.

XVII

AFTER LONG SILENCE

Speech after long silence ; it is right,
All other lovers being estranged or
dead,
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its
shade,
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly
night,
That we descant and yet again descant
Upon the supreme theme of Art and
Song :
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom ; young
We loved each other and were ignorant.

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 79

XVIII

MAD AS THE MIST AND SNOW

Bolt and bar the shutter,
For the foul winds blow :
Our minds are at their best this night,
And I seem to know
That everything outside us is
Mad as the mist and snow.

Horace there by Homer stands,
Plato stands below,
And here is Tully's open page.
How many years ago
Were you and I unlettered lads
Mad as the mist and snow ?

You ask what makes me sigh, old
friend,
What makes me shudder so ?
I shudder and I sigh to think
That even Cicero
And many-minded Homer were
Mad as the mist and snow.

80 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

XIX

THOSE DANCING DAYS ARE GONE

Come, let me sing into your ear ;
Those dancing days are gone,
All that silk and satin gear ;
Crouch upon a stone,
Wrapping that foul body up
In as foul a rag :
I carry the sun in a golden cup,
The moon in a silver bag.

Curse as you may I sing it through ;
What matter if the knave
That the most could pleasure you,
The children that he gave,
Are somewhere sleeping like a top
Under a marble flag ?
I carry the sun in a golden cup,
The moon in a silver bag.

I thought it out this very day,
Noon upon the clock,

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 81

A man may put pretence away
Who leans upon a stick,
May sing, and sing until he drop,
Whether to maid or hag :
*I carry the sun in a golden cup,
The moon in a silver bag.*

XX

‘ I AM OF IRELAND ’

‘ *I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,*’ cried she.
‘ *Come out of charity,
Come dance with me in Ireland.*’

One man, one man alone
In that outlandish gear,
One solitary man
Of all that rambled there
Had turned his stately head.
‘ That is a long way off,

82 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

And time runs on,' he said,
' And the night grows rough.'

*' I am of Ireland, .
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
' Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'*

' The fiddlers are all thumbs,
Or the fiddle-string accursed,
The drums and the kettledrums
And the trumpets all are burst,
And the trombone,' cried he,
' The trumpet and trombone,'
And cocked a malicious eye,
' But time runs on, runs on.'

*' I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
' Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'*

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 83

XXI

THE DANCER AT CRUACHAN¹ AND CRO-PATRICK

I, proclaiming that there is
Among birds or beasts or men,
One that is perfect or at peace,
Danced on Cruachan's windy plain,
Upon Cro-Patrick sang aloud ;
All that could run or leap or swim
Whether in wood, water or cloud,
Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming
Him.

¹ Pronounced in modern Gaelic as if spelt 'Crockan.'

XXII

TOM THE LUNATIC

Sang old Tom the lunatic
That sleeps under the canopy ;
' What change has put my thoughts
astray
And eyes that had so keen a sight ?

84 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

What has turned to smoking wick
Nature's pure unchanging light ?

‘ Huddon and Duddon and Daniel
O’Leary,
Holy Joe, the beggar-man,
Wenching, drinking, still remain
Or sing a penance on the road ;
Something made these eyeballs weary
That blinked and saw them in a shroud.

‘ Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God’s unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood ;
In that faith I live or die.’

XXIII

TOM AT CRUACHAN

On Cruachan’s plain slept he
That must sing in a rhyme

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS 85

What most could shake his soul :
' The stallion Eternity
Mounted the mare of Time,
'Gat the foal of the world.'

XXIV

OLD TOM AGAIN

Things out of perfection sail,
And all their yellow canvas wear,
Nor shall the self-begotten fail
Though fantastic men suppose
Building-yard and stormy shore,
Winding-sheet and swaddling-clothes.

XXV

THE DELPHIC ORACLE UPON PLOTINUS

Behold that great Plotinus swim
Buffeted by such seas ;
Bland Rhadamanthus beckons him,
But the Golden Race looks dim,
Salt blood blocks his eyes.

86 WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

Scattered on the level grass
Or winding through the grove
Plato there and Minos pass,
There stately Pythagoras
And all the choir of Love.

August 19, 1931

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

I

FATHER AND CHILD

SHE hears me strike the board and say
That she is under ban
Of all good men and women,
Being mentioned with a man
That has the worst of all bad names;
And thereupon replies
That his hair is beautiful,
Cold as the March wind his eyes.

II

BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE

If I make the lashes dark
And the eyes more bright

88 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

And the lips more scarlet,
Or ask if all be right
From mirror after mirror,
No vanity's displayed :
I'm looking for the face I had
Before the world was made.

What if I look upon a man
As though on my beloved,
And my blood be cold the while
And my heart unmoved ?
Why should he think me cruel
Or that he is betrayed ?
I'd have him love the thing that was
Before the world was made.

III

A FIRST CONFESSION

I admit the briar
Entangled in my hair
Did not injure me ;
My blenching and trembling

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 89

Nothing but dissembling,
Nothing but coquetry.

I long for truth, and yet
I cannot stay from that
My better self disowns,
For a man's attention
Brings such satisfaction
To the craving in my bones.

Brightness that I pull back
From the Zodiac,
Why those questioning eyes
That are fixed upon me ?
What can they do but shun me
If empty night replies ?

IV

HER TRIUMPH

I did the dragon's will until you came
Because I had fancied love a casual
Improvisation, or a settled game

90 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

That followed if I let the kerchief fall :
Those deeds were best that gave the
minute wings

And heavenly music if they gave it wit ;
And then you stood among the dragon-
rings.

I mocked, being crazy, but you mas-
tered it

And broke the chain and set my ankles
free,

Saint George or else a pagan Perseus ;
And now we stare astonished at these ,
And a miraculous strange bird shrieks
at us.

V

CONSOLATION

O but there is wisdom
In what the sages said ;
But stretch that body for a while
And lay down that head
Till I have told the sages
Where man is comforted.

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 91

How could passion run so deep
Had I never thought
That the crime of being born
Blackens all our lot ?
But where the crime's committed
The crime can be forgot.

VI

CHOSEN

The lot of love is chosen. I learnt that
much
Struggling for an image on the track
Of the whirling Zodiac.
Scarce did he my body touch,
Scarce sank he from the west
Or found a subterranean rest
On the maternal midnight of my breast
Before I had marked him on his
northern way,
And seemed to stand although in bed
I lay.

92 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

I struggled with the horror of daybreak,
I chose it for my lot ! If questioned on
My utmost pleasure with a man
By some new-married bride, I take
That stillness for a theme
Where his heart my heart did seem
And both adrift on the miraculous
stream
Where—wrote a learned astrologer—
The Zodiac is changed into a sphere.

VII

PARTING

He. Dear, I must be gone
While night shuts the eyes
Of the household spies ;
That song announces dawn.
She. No, night's bird and love's
Bids all true lovers rest,
While his loud song reproves
The murderous stealth of day.

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 9

He. Daylight already flies
From mountain crest to crest.

She. That light is from the moon.

He. That bird . . .

She. Let him sing on,
I offer to love's play
My dark declivities.

VIII

HER VISION IN THE WOOD

Dry timber under that rich foliage,
At wine-dark midnight in the sacred
wood,
Too old for a man's love I stood in r ge
Imagining men. Imagining th t I
could
A greater with a lesser pang ssuage
Or but to find if withered vein ran
blood,
I tore my body that its wine might
cover
Whatever could recall the lip of lover.

94 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

And after that I held my fingers up, "
Stared at the wine-dark nail, or dark
that ran

Down every withered finger from the
top ;

But the dark changed to red, and
torches shone,

And deafening music shook the leaves ;
a troop

Shouldered a litter with a wounded
man,

Or smote upon the string and to the
sound

Sang of the beast that gave the fatal
wound.

All stately women moving to a song
With loosened hair or foreheads grief-
distraught,

It seemed a Quattrocento painter's
throng,

A thoughtless image of Mantegna's
thought—

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 95

Why should they think that are for
ever young ?

Till suddenly in grief's contagion
caught,

I stared upon his blood-bedabbled
breast

And sang my malediction with the rest.

That thing all blood and mire, that
beast-torn wreck,

Half turned and fixed a glazing eye on
mine,

And, though love's bitter-sweet had all
come back,

Those bodies from a picture or a
coin

Nor saw my body fall nor heard it
shriek,

Nor knew, drunken with singing as
with wine,

That they had brought no fabulous
symbol there

But my heart's victim and its torturer.

96 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

IX

A LAST CONFESSION

What lively lad most pleased me
Of all that with me lay ?
I answer that I gave my soul
And loved in misery,
But had great pleasure with a lad
That I loved bodily.

Flinging from his arms I laughed
To think his passion such
He fancied that I gave a soul
Did but our bodies touch,
And laughed upon his breast to think
Beast gave beast as much.

I gave what other women gave
That stepped out of their clothes,
But when this soul, its body off,
Naked to naked goes,

A. WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 97

He it has found shall find therein
What none other knows,

And give his own and take his own
And rule in his own right ;
And though it loved in misery
Close and cling so tight,
There's not a bird of day that d re
Extinguish that delight.

X

MEETING

Hidden by old age awhile
In masker's cloak and hood,
Each hating what the other loved,
Face to face we stood :
' That I have met with such,' said he,
' Bodes me little good.'

' Let others boast their fill,' said I,
' But never dare to boast
That such as I had such a man
For lover in the past ;

98 A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

Say that of living men I hate
Such a man the most.'

'A loony'd boast of such a love,'
He in his rage declared :
But such as he for such as me—
Could we both discard
This beggarly habiliment—
Had found a sweeter word.

XI

FROM THE 'ANTIGONE'

Overcome—O bitter sweetness,
Inhabitant of the soft cheek of a girl—
The rich man and his affairs,
The fat flocks and the fields' fatness,
Mariners, rough harvesters ;
Overcome Gods upon Parnassus ;

Overcome the Empyrean ; hurl
Heaven and Earth out of their places,

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD 99

That in the same calamity
Brother and brother, friend and friend,
Family and family,
City and city may contend,
By that great glory driven wild.

Pray I will and sing I must,
And yet I weep—Oedipus' child
Descends into the loveless dust.

NOTES

'I AM of Ireland' is developed from three or four lines of an Irish fourteenth-century dance song somebody repeated to me a few years ago. 'The sun in a golden cup' in the poem that precedes it, though not 'The moon in a silver bag', is a quotation from somewhere in Mr. Ezra Pound's 'Cantos'. In this book and elsewhere, I have used towers, and one tower in particular, as symbols and have compared their winding stairs to the philosophical gyres, but it is hardly necessary to interpret what comes from the main track of thought and expression. Shelley uses towers constantly as symbols, and there are gyres in Swedenborg, and in Thomas Aquinas and certain classical authors. Part of the symbolism of 'Blood and the Moon' was suggested by the fact that Thoor Ballylee has a waste room at the top and that butterflies come in through the loopholes and die against the window-panes. The 'learned astrologer' in 'Chosen' was Macrobius, and the particular

passage was found for me by Dr. Sturm, that too little known poet and mystic. It is from Macrobius's comment upon 'Scipio's Dream' (Lib. I. Cap. XII. Sec. 5): '... when the sun is in Aquarius, we sacrifice to the Shades, for it is in the sign inimical to human life; and from thence the meeting-place of Zodiac and Milky Way, the descending soul by its deflection is drawn out of the spherical, the sole divine form, into the cone'. In 'The Mother of God' the words 'a fallen flare through the hollow of an ear' are, I am told, obscure. I had in my memory Byzantine mosaic pictures of the Annunciation, which show a line drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin. She conceived of the Word, and therefore through the ear a star fell and was born.

THE END